

I'm still a little focused on what happened to my Dannon."

#### PERSONAL EXPLANATION

### HON. LOUISE McINTOSH SLAUGHTER

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 22, 2008*

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Madam Speaker, I was unavoidably detained and missed Rollcall vote 18. Had been present, I would have voted "aye" on rollcall No. 18.

#### "RETRO PAY" FOR DISABLED RETIREE VETERANS

### HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 22, 2008*

Mr. KUCINICH. Madam Speaker, I wish to submit to the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD an article dated December 19, 2007 summarizing the plight of many of our Nation's veterans as they wait for their benefits.

[From the Plain Dealer, Dec. 19, 2007]

DFAS SAYS HIRING TO CLEAR BACKLOG OF DISABLED VETS' BENEFITS CLAIMS

(By Sabrina Eaton)

WASHINGTON.—The federal agency that processes pay for military retirees pledged Tuesday that its contractor will hire an extra 61 workers in Cleveland to clear a backlog of more than 48,000 benefit claims from veterans who are disabled by combat injuries.

The director of the Defense Finance and Accounting Service promised Cleveland Democratic Rep. Dennis Kucinich that the backlog of claims—some of which date to 2003—will be eliminated by April with the extra push from contractor Lockheed Martin.

"Federal benefits are meaningless if the intended beneficiaries do not receive them," said Kucinich, who called it a "tragedy" that so many veterans have waited for years to get money they're entitled to under a pair of programs for disabled veterans.

The payments stem from a law enacted in 2003 that ended a ban on veterans simultaneously receiving military retirement pay and disability compensation for health problems traceable to military service. Before 2003, veterans had to choose.

Disabled veterans have to apply for the simultaneous payments under the "Combat-Related Special Compensation" and "Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay" programs. After they are approved, veterans can get back pay to the date their eligibility began.

DFAS and the Department of Veterans Affairs have already processed more than 130,000 of the cases and paid out more than \$220 million, says DFAS spokesman Thomas LaRock. Average payments to veterans under the program have been \$1,700, he said.

LaRock said the easiest claims were handled first. The more-complex cases were delayed because they require manual computations. He said many of them are affected by special circumstances, like changes in the veterans' disability level.

"These are complicated cases that are left, and we are processing them as soon as we can," agreed Lockheed Martin spokeswoman Emily Simone.

One of the many veterans who has been lobbying DFAS, retired Army pilot Wavie Sharp of San Antonio, Texas, says payments have been handled in a "painfully slow manner," and he noted that some older veterans have died waiting for their money. He blames the problems on DFAS for failing to demand progress from Lockheed Martin until Kucinich intervened.

"I'm angry," said Sharp, who figures he is personally owed between \$10,000 and \$31,000. "They've been dragging their feet for four years. This is a long time to ask for patience. Thank God for Mr. Kucinich. Everyone else gave us lip service."

#### NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES

### HON. ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 22, 2008*

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Madam Speaker, the critical national security challenges the U.S. faces throughout the Western Hemisphere demand our support of strong allies, like Colombia, in the region. The historic ties between the U.S. and Colombia have only deepened in recent years as our cooperative efforts to surmount security, economic and social concerns have intensified.

With this in mind, I would like to offer my warmest congratulations to Captain Hernando Wills on the occasion of his promotion to Rear Admiral of the Colombian National Navy.

The following excerpts from Colombian Ambassador Carolina Barco's remarks highlight the significance that Rear Admiral Wills' promotion holds for the U.S.-Colombia relationship.

The relations between the United States and Colombia are not only their oldest in this continent, they also reflect a great understanding between our nations. Our relations encompass important historical events, such as the deployment in 1951 of the frigate *Amirante Padilla* and the Batallón Colombia to fight for democracy in Korea alongside U.S. Forces. Colombia was the only Latin American country to deploy troops in that multinational force, which cost the lives of 146 countrymen, with 69 missing and 448 wounded in combat. The participation of our soldiers in the peace keeping forces at the Suez Canal in 1956, the deployment of the Batallón Colombia since 1982 with the peace forces in the Sinai Peninsula, and innumerable episodes, give faith to the integration of our peoples under the flags of democracy and respect for human dignity.

I want to highlight this year as particularly fruitful for the joint work of the Navies of Colombia and the United States: their participation in important exercises such as UNITAS and PANAMAX, the first focused on standardizing procedures among the navies of the hemisphere and to maintain a level of training that will permit a joint defense of this continent, and the second with the purpose of organizing a defense of the Panama Canal.

Because of the nature of our peoples, military action goes beyond defense, successfully engaging in humanitarian endeavors, such as the deployment of the U.S. Navy's hospital

ship *Comfort* to the Colombian coast providing medical attention to thousands of beneficiaries, and the joint participation of Colombia in the Joint Inter-Agency Task Force South in Key West, and the engagement of Colombian river operations' experts training U.S. Navy personnel for their future responsibilities in Afghanistan.

For all the aforementioned, the decision of the Colombian Government to promote Captain Hernando Wills to the rank of Rear Admiral is not an isolated event: it complements the experiences of an inured sailor with the doctrine of National Defense University to defeat narco-terrorism, strengthen democracy, and return to Colombians the possibilities of development in peace, under the mandate of profound respect for human dignity clearly stated in the National Constitution.

#### CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY MODERNIZATION ACT

### HON. CHARLES A. GONZALEZ

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 22, 2008*

Mr. GONZALEZ. Madam Speaker, I rise today to commend the chairman and ranking member and my colleagues for their efforts on behalf of H.R. 4040. This hard work and dedicated service has produced a strong, bipartisan Consumer Product Safety Modernization Act. Congress and the American people can be proud of this significant and needed accomplishment.

While this legislation includes many important reforms of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, and I strongly support its passage, the bill does not address one important issue that I think deserves further attention in any House-Senate Conference Committee deliberations. That issue involved the labeling or packaging of a product which may reference a product safety standard. It is important we address this issue for the well-being and safety of our citizens.

In some cases a product may bear a label or packaging material referencing a safety standard, when the product was not tested or certified to meet the standard listed on the label or packaging. This deceptive labeling can be a grave threat to the safety of many consumer products on the market, and must be addressed as part of this comprehensive legislation.

I hope that as this important piece of legislation moves its way through the Conference Committee process we will further examine and address this labeling and packaging issue.

#### PERSONAL EXPLANATION

### HON. ADAM SMITH

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, January 22, 2008*

Mr. SMITH of Washington. Madam Speaker, on January 16, 2008, on Rollcall vote No. 8, during consideration of H.R. 2768, Supplemental Mine Improvement and New Emergency Response Act of 2007, I incorrectly voted "aye," when I intended to vote "no."